

State Representative

Jerry Denbo

Assistant Majority Caucus Chairman

The 2000 Session of the Indiana Legislature



How To Reach
Representative

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March, 2000

Dear Friends,

The 2000 session of the Indiana General Assembly ended on March 3.

Though it was a short session, we passed several significant pieces of legislation, including a plan to distribute the funds Indiana will receive from the tobacco settlement and a proposal to increase benefits for workers severely injured on the job. We also adjusted the unemployment compensation system, making improvements for both workers and employers. And, we passed a bill to allow the display of the Ten Commandments on governmental property.

I have detailed several new laws in this newsletter and have included some other information that you might find useful.

In the coming months, I will be working on interim study committees. Study committees allow legislators the opportunity to explore subjects in greater depth than is permitted during the session.

Please keep contact, and may God be with you.

Sincerely,



E-mail updates available on state legislative issues

Several people have indicated to me that they would like to receive e-mail updates on legislative issues and other issues important to our district. I am pleased to offer this service through my legislative office.

Simply e-mail or call my office and I will add you to this list. I am excited about the technological advances over the past few years that allow you nearly instant access to legislative news and information.

Inside this newsletter

Tobacco Settlement
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Session News Organ Donations

Employees at the Bureau of Motor Vehicles will be asked to ask whether license applicants wish to make an anatomical gift. Those who choose to do so will receive an identifying symbol on their licenses. In addition, individuals believe they are registered as donors, but in fact they are not. This ensures that doctors ask applicants. The Bureau of Motor Vehicles will now have the authority to establish the Anatomical Gift Promotion Fund, which would receive donations from organizations that promote procurement of organs for medical gifts.

Environment

Supports of a massive fish kill on the White River in Indiana led legislators with Gov. O'Bannon in passing several environmental protection initiatives. The bill will require the Indiana Department of Environmental Management to compile a report on the condition of the river and the procedures to speed cleanup time in the event of hazardous spills. We will improve notification procedures to protect people in contaminated areas, double the fines charged to violators.

Legislature allocates tobacco funds

Bi-partisan agreement to help several programs and groups

Certainly one of the biggest achievements of the 2000 legislative session was passage of legislation that sets up a system to allocate more than \$4 billion Indiana will be receiving from the national tobacco settlement over the next 25 years. The funds will be used for health care services, tobacco prevention programs and assistance for senior citizens on lower incomes who have trouble purchasing prescription drugs.

The final bill was the result of many months of work by legislators on both sides of the aisle. From the start, we have attempted to assure that most of the funding goes to health care and efforts to reduce the use of tobacco products.

In the first year alone, \$35 million will be dedicated toward health care programs, with an emphasis on tobacco education and prevention. Another \$20 million will be used to help seniors on low incomes purchase needed prescription drugs. Community health centers will receive \$15 million in program support, along with a one-time-only appropriation of \$10 million to make physical improvements to facilities.

This is a considerable accomplishment for a short session of the Legislature, and it is a tribute to the willingness of officials to set aside partisan differences in order to pass bills that will have long-term benefits for the people of our state.

Settlement will help rural Indiana, farmers

The national tobacco settlement legislation approved this session provides a framework to help rural Indiana and farmers who grow the product. While no money was appropriated to help in these two areas, the final bill does create a fund that eventually will dedicate assistance to areas of the state that will suffer economically through the loss of tobacco production.

The Rural Community Impact Fund will help develop new agricultural enterprises in those cities and towns, including facilities for research and development, new market opportunities, educational and leadership development programs and direct financial assistance. The Tobacco Farmers Impact Fund will help producers make a successful transition to alternative, economically viable commodities and support efforts to preserve and maintain Indiana family farms and farmland.

Senior citizens will also see benefits

Senior citizens on lower incomes should not have to choose between buying food to eat or the prescription drugs they need to remain healthy. Thanks to the legislation allocating money from the national tobacco settlement, they won't have to make that decision.

The final bill includes \$20 million to help low income seniors purchase prescription drugs. From my visits around the district, this is one of the most pressing concerns among older Hoosiers. Some people even have been forced to drive as far as Canada to get these drugs at a more affordable rate.



Rep. Denbo discusses legislation with Speaker John R. Gregg.

Ten Commandments may now be displayed on public property

National attention drawn to Indiana

I was particularly pleased that we passed a bill that would give state and local governments the right to display the Ten Commandments on public property. This is a bill that I authored and was proud to do so.

The new law is not a mandate. Rather, it gives local governments the option to display the Ten Commandments if they choose. It also would permit local officials to decide which version of the Commandments to display.

The general feeling at the Statehouse is that this legislation reflects the sentiments of a vast majority of the people of Indiana, that our country was founded on the principles contained in the Ten Commandments.

The bill was one of the most controversial in recent years, and as a result, it drew large attention nationwide. Indiana was the first state to pass such legislation, and several other states are expected to follow.

Research & Development

New legislation aimed at improving Hoosier economy

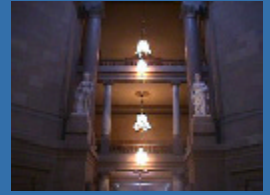
Efforts to upgrade the state's programs to attract more research and development jobs received support from the Legislature this session.

In November, we approved a bill that extends the life of tax credits for research and development and gives local governments more flexibility to claim abatements for new research equipment.

There has been a lot of talk in recent years about improving efforts to stop a "brain drain" of young people from our state that started because we did not have the quality high-paying jobs that would convince them to stay. With passage of this proposal, we are encouraging companies already working in Research and Development to expand their efforts in making Indiana more competitive in attracting new firms to our state. These are the kinds of jobs that can convince our college graduates to stay in the state after getting out of school.



Rep. Denbo presented a check to Greene County Volunteer Firefighters during the recent legislative session.



Session News

Property tax reform

As with any session, there were disappointments and this year was no exception. Once again, my biggest disappointment was the failure to enact legislation dealing with property taxes.

Until we pass legislation dealing with this unfair and outdated system, I intend to keep on pushing the issue.

This year, we have the added problem of property tax reassessment. The courts have ruled our current system as being unconstitutional. However, county assessors from throughout the state say that they are not prepared to properly handle the new proposed system at this time.

After conducting hearings on the subject this past fall, I co-authored a bill to delay the new system. The bill had near-unanimous support from county assessors, and it passed the House. However, the bill failed to pass the Senate.



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Call the Statehouse toll-free

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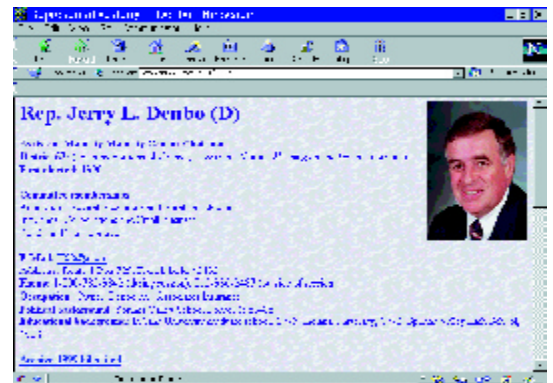
State legislative web site

The state web site provides a great deal of information about state government, the legislative process and other related items. The main site at www.state.in.us offers a nice starting point to explore government in Indiana.

From that starting point, you can visit the home pages of elected state officials and state agencies. In addition, several premium services are available for a monthly fee.

A new feature on my web site will allow you to request various House publications. We currently offer publications specifically designed for senior citizens, grade-school children, and high school students in the process of choosing a college. Other publications give a general overview of various Indiana state agencies, offer a guide to women's health and advise how to avoid being the victim of a scam. There is also a booklet available which details every bill that became law during this year's legislative session.

You may also request booklets by calling my legislative office at 1-800-382-9842.



A screen shot of my legislative home page

Top Five State Web Sites*

1. State Job Bank
2. Hoosier Lottery Homepage
3. Attorney General's Unclaimed Property Search
4. General Assembly homepage
5. Dept. of Environmental Management homepage

*Based on number of visitors as of February 25, 2000